

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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P 081250Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9678

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 4260

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, MORG, CB

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT CRISIS TEMPORARILY AVERTED

1. I CALLED ON PRIME MINISTER LONG BORET LATE AFTERNOON, MARCH 8. PRIOR TO GOING TO HIS HOUSE I HAD RECEIVED REPORT THAT PRIME MINISTER HAD INFORMED MARSHAL LON NOL OF HIS INTENTION TO RESIGN ON MONDAY, MARCH 10.

2. IN COURSE OF MEETING, I ASKED LONG BORET WHY HE WANTED TO RESIGN. HE REPLIED THAT HE WISHED TO RESHUFFLE HIS CABINET AND ALSO BRING KHMER MILITARY UNDER CIVILIAN CONTROL. HE CLAIMED THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE UNDER PRESENT FANK LEADERSHIP, I.E. GENERAL SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ. FURTHERMORE, LONG BORET SAID, KHMER MENTALITY IS DIFFERENT FROM OCCIDENTIAL MIND. INSTEAD OF CLOSING RANKS IN TIME OF CRISIS, KHMERS WILL ONLY GET OUT OF PRESENT PESSIMISTIC, GLOOMY MOOD IF A NEW MILITARY COMMANDER IS INSTALLED. LONG BORET ADMITTED THAT SOSTHENE IS A HIGHLY SKILLED MILITARY OFFICER BUT FANK'S PERFORMANCE ON THE BATTLEFIELD DURING THE LAST TWO MONTHS HAS BEEN DISAPPOINTING. ACCORDING TO LONG BORET, IN CAMBODIA, SOLDIERS FIGHT FOR PERSONALITIES RATHER THAN FOR IDEALS, HE CLAIMED THAT MANY FANK OFFICERS ARE ALSO DISCOURAGED BY SETBACKS AND LOOK FOR A SCAPE GOAT RATHER THAN RECTIFYING REASONS FOR REVERSES. LONG BORET SAID THAT CHANGE IN FANK LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP MIGHT KINDLE SPARK OF HOPE OF THINGS GETTING BETTER WHICH IN TURN MIGHT GET PEOPLE TO JOIN THE ARMY, FIGHT HARDER, RATHER THAN

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CONTINUE AT PRESENT PACE WHICH EVERYBODY THINKS WILL

LEAD TO INEVITABLE DEFEAT. I ARGUED FOR MORE THAN ONE HOUR AGAINST THIS REASONING, POINTING OUT THAT OUR MILITARY STAFF THOUGH HIGHLY OF SOSTHENE AND, JUST BECAUSE FANK HAD SOME REVERSES, SOSTHENE SHOULD NOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THEM. THE REASON FOR FANK'S FAILURES ARE NATIONAL FAILINGS NOT SOSTHENE'S FAULTS. I ALSO INQUIRED WHO COULD TAKE SOSTHENE'S PLACE. LONG BORET REPLIED THAT LTG SAK SUTSAKHAN HAD BEEN VICE CHIEF OF STAFF AND HE WOULD BE HIS CANDIDATE TO REPLACE SOSTHENE.

3. MY FIRST TASK WAS TO HEAD OFF THE PRIME MINISTER'S RESIGNATION ON MONDAY. I EXPLAINED THAT SUCH AN ACT, COMING AT A TIME WHEN THE AMERICAN CONGRESS IS DEBATING SUPPLEMENTAL ASSISTANCE TO CAMBODIA, WOULD HAVE A DISASTROUS EFFECT ON AMERICAN LEGISLATORS. IT WOULD SHOW LACK OF UNITY AMONG KHMERS AND WOULD PROBABLY LEAD TO A NEGATIVE VOTE ON THE PRESIDENT'S REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDS. I USED STRONG LANGUAGE SUCH AS "SUICIDE" IF HE WERE TO PROCEED WITH HIS INTENTION OF RESIGNING. AFTER MUCH DISCUSSION, THE PRIME MINISTER AGREED NOT TO PROCEED WITH HIS PLANS TO RESIGN--AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER THE VOTE HAS BEEN TAKEN IN THE CONGRESS. IN REPLY TO HIS QUESTION WHEN THIS VOTE MIGHT OCCUR, I SAID THAT CONGRESS WAS PLANNING TO GO ON AN EASTER RECESS ON MARCH 26 AND I OPINED THAT IT MIGHT BE SOME TIME BEFORE THAT DATE. EVEN AFTER VOTE HAD BEEN TAKEN I SAID IT WOULD BE UNPATRIOTIC FOR LONG BORET TO STEP DOWN. HE SHOULD FACE THE PROBLEMS AND TRY TO RESOLVE THEM RATHER THAN GIVE UP AND WALK AWAY.

4. AS FOR THE CHANGE IN FANK LEADERSHIP, I ARRANGED FOR A MEETING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER AND GENERAL PALMER TOMORROW, SUNDAY, MARCH 9 AT MY RESIDENCE SO THAT LONG BORET CAN HEAR FIRST HAND FROM MY SENIOR MILITARY ADVISOR OUR VIEW OF SOSTHENE. LONG BORET WOULD ALSO HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLAIN WHAT HE CONSIDERS TO BE THE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES WHICH SHOULD PREVAIL UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES.

5. IN CONCLUSION, I THINK WE HAVE GAINED TIME. HOPE-
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FULLY A WAY WILL BE FOUND TO PREVENT THE PROFOUND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KHMER MILITARY AND CIVILIANS FROM COMING OUT IN THE OPEN, BECAUSE IT WOULD GIVE ONE MORE ARGUMENT TO OPPONENTS OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL AID REQUEST.
DEAN

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRIME MINISTER, MILITARY PERSONNEL, PERSONNEL RESIGNATIONS, PERSONNEL SEPARATIONS, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: RowellE0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PHNOM04260
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750082-0074
From: PHNOM PENH
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750369/aaaackoq.tel
Line Count: 112
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: RowellE0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 JUL 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <13 NOV 2003 by RowellE0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOVERNMENT CRISIS TEMPORARILY AVERTED
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, MORG, CB, (LONG BORET)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006